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ART NEEDLEWORK

CHURCH EMBROIDERY.

HINTS FOR BEGINNERS CONCERNING MATERIALS AND STITCHES—APPLIQUÉ WORK—CARDBOARD FOUNDATIONS.



THE difference between ecclesiastical embroidery and decorative needlework for secular purposes lies mainly in limitations as to design and color. The same stitches are in use for both; indeed modern art embroidery is but a revival of the ancient "stitchery," which was chiefly directed to the service of the church. In copying ancient designs on linen, or attempting to reproduce tapestry effects, a variety of stitches are called into use, but the more usual style of modern church needlework is almost entirely accomplished by what is known as appliqué or applied work. The largest purveyors of church decoration in the city of New York use applied designs, imported directly from France and Belgium, in great varieties, including monograms, symbolic devices, what are known as "powderings," and even intricate patterns for borderings. Not only are these beautiful specimens of church embroidery imported, but after a selection has been made and the material for the groundwork chosen, they are sometimes reshipped to Europe, and the applied work is transferred by the same nimble fingers that produced it. There are, therefore, comparatively few occasions now upon which designs are elaborately worked upon the material itself; but as home workers who enter upon their task as a labor of love may prefer to execute it in more elaborate style, a few simple directions as to suitable materials and stitches may be of value.

The simplest of all stitches is chain stitch,* which is an imitation of the old tambour stitch, but which is now worked without a frame. This stitch is formed by the thread of silk or cotton being carried at the back of the material to be caught through and looped along the surface by a needle like a crochet-hook. In working it the cloth is held in the hand, while upon the forefinger loop after loop is made along the lines of the pattern by means of an ordinary needle threaded with the silk, crewel, or thread selected for the work. This stitch is especially suitable for designs on linen intended for the altar. Where dots are indicated in the design, to enrich or fill up the pattern, the back stitch, worked in soft silk or cotton, is required. If a more raised appearance still is wanted, the French knot, which is difficult to describe but very easy to make, is effective. To make this knot perfectly only requires practice; the needle filled with silk is passed through the material from the back at the exact spot where the knot is wanted, then the silk is taken in the left hand and twisted once, twice, or thrice around the needle, then the point of the needle is placed as nearly as possible in the place where it came through, and the thread is drawn through with the left hand. In ancient embroideries of figures the flesh was very often entirely worked in these raised French knots, but now they are mainly used for dotted patterns, or raised petals in flower designs. Colored embroidery on linen is not very usual, but when it is desired leaves in a floral design can be outlined in crimson, the veins worked in blue, and the dots in white. Stems should be merely outlined. Designing upon linen is simple enough, but when the material presents a roughened surface the process

is difficult. In every case, however, the method is the same. Before using linen, either as a foundation or as the material for the purpose intended, it ought to be well scalded, pulled even while wet, and then smoothly ironed. The next step is to trace the design on thin paper, and that having been very carefully done, it is laid upon the linen, and the outline pricked through in fine holes, close together, after which pouncing powder is thoroughly rubbed over the perforated design. The best pounce powder is made by pulverizing a small cake of common pipe-clay and mixing it with charcoal. The pounce powder should be rubbed on with a flannel wad. When the paper is removed the design should appear accurately marked on the linen, but for further security it is desirable to go over the outline with a fine camel's-hair brush dipped in India ink.

Chain stitch is not only the easiest and simplest stitch in use in ecclesiastical embroidery, but it is also the only one that can be well attempted upon a design of any importance without a frame. Usually the material

The gold threads so extensively found in old embroidery were seldom passed through the material; they were usually laid on by the stitch known as couching, which is still largely used. Couching consists in laying the gold or silver threads upon the material and fastening them down by stitches taken at intervals. Sometimes these stitches are placed quite regularly, so as to form a perfect diapered pattern on the ground, or they are placed irregularly and form the variety known as wavy couching. Very great effect can be produced by laying the threads straight and placing the stitches across them diagonally; or couching may be accomplished in a diamond pattern, and in that style is especially suitable for passing in large ornamentation, such as fleur-de-lis or very elaborate monograms.

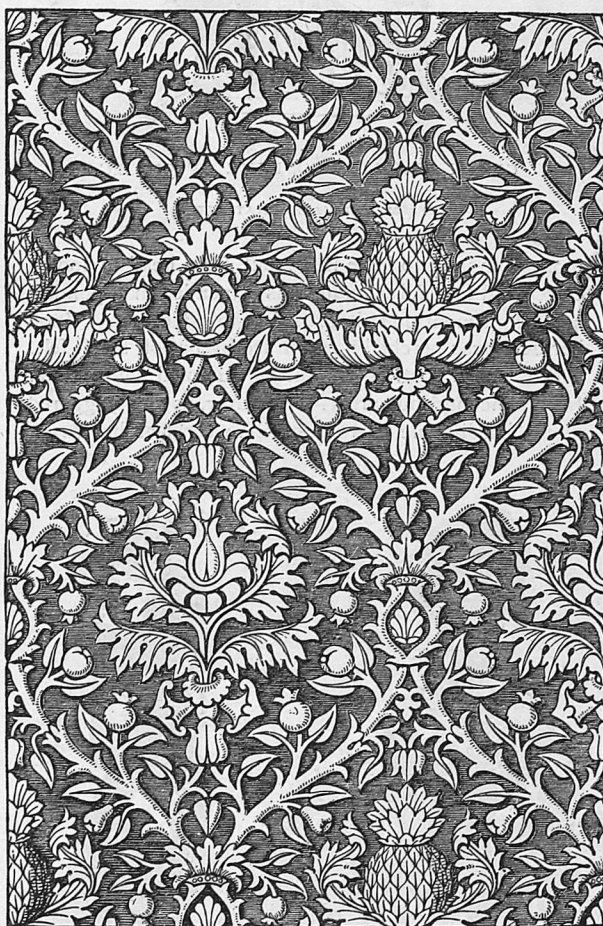
There is indeed no limit to the variety of patterns that can be accomplished by different couchings; and equally prolific and more popular effects are produced by the use of "long" stitch. All embroidery in floss silk is wrought by means of this long stitch, and almost all raised effects are managed by it. It consists simply in passing the needle through the material and repassing it at any distance selected, either in straight or slanting lines, toward the edge of the design.

Basket stitch is an amplification of long stitch. A foundation or stuffing of soft material being sewn on over the design and covered by regular long stitch, silk of another color or gold thread is then passed under and over the straight lines and stitched down at intervals to represent any form of basket pattern desired.

The use of gold in church embroidery has lately been considerably modified; for although, if properly protected, bullion embroidery may be preserved for many years, still exposure will effectually destroy it, and the gold embroidery on hangings used in a damp church has been found perfectly black after a short interval. Gold-colored twist silk is, therefore, very often substituted for the more precious gold thread found so abundantly in ancient ecclesiastical work, and very good effects are produced by it. In modern churches gas is so destructive to gold bullion that even with the greatest desire to devote the most precious material to the sacred service there is a natural hesitancy about running so serious a risk.

Designs to be worked in gold bullion must be raised by the use of yellow carpet-thread. A skein of this coarse material should be cut into lengths, and a number of threads (according to the amount of raising required) placed evenly side by side and then sewn carefully down on the background. Bullion is not only very expensive, but requires great skill in work; it must be first cut into lengths, and then each length as it is required must be picked up on a needle threaded with gold-colored silk and run along the silk to the place where it is to remain. The same careful treatment is necessary in the use of gold cord. Gold twist is more easily managed; it can be laid on the surface and simply sewn on with fine gold silk, the stitches being taken slantwise to conceal them as much as possible. The silks in use, either to replace or to supplement the use of gold threads, are chiefly varieties of the old floss silk, now known as embroidery or bobbin silk; filoselle, which is pure silk; purse silk, twisted silk, and Dacca silk.

Floss silk was universally used in ancient embroidery. Laid in rows on the surface of the material, and kept down by rows of fine gold thread, it represented by turns tessellated pavements, draperies, canopies, even the attributes of saints or martyrs. Split fine it was employed for the flesh and hair, and many threads of it laid together served to outline a face or figure. Nearly every flower in mediæval needlework was wrought in floss silk, and for this reason it is still pre-



SIXTEENTH CENTURY EMBROIDERY.

BELONGING TO THE DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE.

selected for church embroidery is velvet cloth or heavy silk or satin, and besides being heavy to hold in the hand, these materials are very apt to be pulled in the working. Even in a frame great care is necessary.



OLD FRENCH BORDER.

Almost all materials used for church embroidering require backing with linen; even when the designs are worked on cardboard and applied on the background it is desirable to have a linen lining extending at least as far as the design. This should never be neglected.

* Illustrations of embroidery stitches were given in the issues of THE ART AMATEUR for June and August, 1879, and for April, May and November, 1880.—ED. A. A.

ferred by many modern needlewomen, although filonelle has largely replaced it.

Appliqué embroidery is said by an eminent authority to be a revival of the old English work called "opus cosutum" or cut work, but in reality it is a method of decoration which has been in use for many ages. The Italians excelled in it, and in our own day the French carry it to remarkable perfection. For powderings, borders, altar chairs, cushions, and even for the hangings of the altar itself, it produces the richest effects. It is especially adapted for labels with inscriptions on altar coverings, church walls, or banners; in fact, it has the merit of producing the effect of the most elaborate embroidery without a tithe of the trouble or labor.

Velvets, cloth, and cloths of gold and silver are the most proper materials to be employed in appliqué on articles for the church. Silk velvets are admirable, and plush is now coming largely into use. Whatever material is selected must be of the very best quality, and, if possible, any admixture of cotton in the texture should be avoided, excepting in the case of white velvet, when the purity of the white is affected by the introduction of silk, which gives it a dingy appearance. White cotton velvet is therefore preferable for applied work, but it must be of the thickest possible texture. Cloth of gold serves as an admirable background for figures, or it is excellent in combination with velvet, but used alone it is too gorgeous for appliqué. For amateur workers cloth is the easiest of all materials for applied work, because the edges are smooth and even. Inscriptions for church walls in cloth letters applied on a groundwork of the same material in different colors are very effective.

All materials intended for applied work must be backed. The first thing to do is to stretch a piece of thin holland tightly on a frame, and cover it all over with embroidery paste, carefully removing the smallest lump from the surface. While the pasted holland is still wet, the velvet or other material of which the appliqué is to be must be laid upon it, smoothing it over with a soft handkerchief to insure its even adhesion. It is best to let it dry slowly, and not to place it near a fire. When perfectly dry it will be found that the material is tenaciously fixed to the holland, and it may be removed from the frame. The entire design may now be pounced through a pricked pattern on the holland side of the velvet, and then cut out with strong sharp scissors. When the material which is to receive the designs has in its turn been stretched on the frame, the figures must be laid in their right positions and held down at small intervals by short pins, put in perpendicularly like nails, until they are secured round all the edges, when stitches of waxed purse silk will fix them permanently. The visible edge of the figures may then be obscured by a cord of the same color as the groundwork, sewn neatly round. All sorts of stitches have been used in applied work for the edge of the transferred design, but the method suggested is the most practical, the easiest, and the least noticeable. The embroidery paste recommended is easily made with three tablespoonfuls of flour and as much powdered resin as will lie on a twenty-five-cent piece, mixed smoothly in a half pint of water and stirred over the fire till it boils.

A great deal of modern church embroidery is executed over cardboard. For monograms, letters, powderings, geometrical figures, or any class of decorative work requiring sharp outlines, the firm edges of a cardboard foundation are invaluable. Most of the French ecclesiastical work imported to America is done in this

way. The design is first traced on thin paper and thence transferred to thin cardboard, either by careful tracing with a stiletto and then pouncing, as in other designing, or by means of transfer paper. The design, once carefully outlined, should be cut out with sharp-pointed scissors. One row of twine, the thickness of the twine regulated by the extent to which the work is to be raised, must then be sewn down the centre of the figure, and over it the silk will be carefully worked. If the embroidery is in gold or gold-colored silk, the upper side of the card foundation should be colored yellow. The most elaborate monograms and patterns are worked in this way, different colored silks being blended in the design, and the effect produced equals that of the finest raised work. A simple pattern for an amateur would be the sacred monogram or a

like the faint tinge of green which is seen in the depths of many white flowers, as if the transparent texture of the petals showed the tender green of the calyx below. This is broken by appliques, of a diamond shape, of deeper toned satin in which a yellow tint mingles. The decoration begins by a mass of yellow and pink roses extremely delicate in tint, showing below bits of deeper-hued flowers. This mass becomes less compact at the outer edges, the roses straying here and there, and the foliage runs toward the bottom (the mass being a little below the centre) and toward the top apparently at will, but the lines are suggestive of a lattice underneath. Richness of texture, beauty of design, and delicacy of color make this one of those pieces of art-needlework which it is unfortunate that the public cannot see before it is finally hung.

Another portière, which is to go to California, where it will be hung in a room fitted up in old oak, is of ruby plush with a frieze of gold cloth, on which is a Moorish decoration in plush appliqué of brilliant bits of color set like gems. This species of decoration is always rendered very effective by the Society of Associated Artists. The embroideries of the Church of the Divine Paternity have been alluded to in these columns, especially the band of such mosaics, only very delicate in color, which was so finely used and which was copied from the jewelled borders of old ecclesiastical embroideries. This use of plush mosaics in friezes and in the framing of embroidered stuffs and also for the principal decoration is worth some study.

A piece of embroidery designed by Mrs. Wheeler to illustrate the particular direction which embroidery in America is taking has been bought by Mr. Prang as a study in color. The ground is a bluish yellow sheen crossed by a horizontal blue line, presenting beautiful changes of color. The decoration chosen is the azalea, as a representative American flower. This is confined within disks disposed in differently arranged groups. The flowers are drawn and colored from nature. The most prominent are carefully produced in every detail, and the perspective is most ingeniously suggested by broader effects, while the remoter bits of foliage appear only in outline.

SIXTEENTH CENTURY EMBROIDERIES.

THE admirable example of old embroidery given on this page is from the collection of Sir Richard Wallace. It is of the Flemish school and of the sixteenth century. Seldom does one find the natural and conventional in plant form so gracefully and effectively combined. Although an "allover" pattern, the repetitions, it will be noticed, are cleverly contrived so that it is difficult

to say where they begin or leave off. The illustration is worth careful study, not only to students of art needlework but also to designers of wall-papers and of upholstery draperies, to whom we think it will be found valuably suggestive.

The larger illustration on the preceding page represents a fine specimen of embroidery of the sixteenth century at Hardwicke Hall, Derbyshire, one of the seats of the Duke of Devonshire. The ground is formed of yellow silk, the outline of crimson, and the branches, flowers, and fruits of gold thread, a variety being given by some portions of the ornament being worked in a more open manner, and arranged in the form of scales. The smaller illustration is a design for a border, a bit of old French work, done in braid, with a little embroidery introduced to give it point and softness.



SIXTEENTH CENTURY EMBROIDERY.

BELONGING TO SIR RICHARD WALLACE.

fleur-de-lis wrought in white and gold on a ground of crimson velvet; or the lily, which is a favorite emblematical flower, would give scope for greater variety in treatment. The leaves, stems, and calyxes might be in gold silk, the flowers in white shaded into gray, the filaments in pale green, and the anthers in orange, upon a crimson or purple ground.

JANET E. RUUTZ REES.

THE ASSOCIATED ARTISTS' NEEDLEWORK.

SOME superb pieces of embroidery are in preparation for the luxurious homes now going up on Fifth Avenue. A portière recently made under Mrs. Wheeler for one of the Vanderbilt houses is of satin whose tint is most